

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Federal Agency Name:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce
- **Funding Opportunity Title:** Community-based Marine Debris Prevention and Removal Project Grants
- **Announcement Type:** Initial Announcement
- **Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number:** 11.463, Habitat Conservation
- **Dates:** Applications should be submitted via www.grants.gov, and must be received by grants.gov **no later than 11:59 PM EST on October 12, 2005**. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted.
- **Application Submission:** Applications should be submitted via www.grants.gov. If grants.gov cannot reasonably be used, applications must be postmarked, or provided to a delivery service and documented with a receipt, by **October 12, 2005**. NOAA Restoration Center, NOAA Fisheries, Office of Habitat Conservation (F/HC3), 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. **ATTN: MDP Project Applications.**
- **Funding Opportunity Description:** The NOAA Marine Debris Program (MDP) provides funding to catalyze the implementation of locally driven, community-based marine debris prevention and removal projects that will benefit coastal habitat, waterways, and NOAA trust resources including anadromous fish. Projects funded through the MDP have strong on-the-ground habitat components involving the removal of marine debris and derelict fishing gear that will provide educational and social benefits for people and their communities in addition to long-term ecological habitat improvements for NOAA trust resources. The role of NOAA in the MDP is to help identify potential marine debris prevention and removal projects, strengthen the development and implementation of habitat restoration through the removal of marine debris within communities, and foster awareness of the effects of marine debris through the funding of outreach and education proposals to further the conservation of living marine resource habitats across a wide geographic area. Proposals selected for funding through this solicitation will be implemented through a cooperative agreement. Funding of up to \$2,000,000 is expected to be available for Community-based Marine Debris Prevention and Removal Project Grants in FY 2006. The NOAA MDP anticipates that typical awards will range from \$15,000 to \$100,000.

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objectives

A principal objective of the NOAA Marine Debris Program (MDP) is to provide federal financial and technical assistance to grass-roots, community-based activities that improve living marine resource habitats through the removal of marine debris and the prevention of debris entering the marine environment, and that promote stewardship and a conservation ethic for NOAA trust resources. NOAA trust resources include coastal habitats, navigational waterways, and living marine resources and their habitats, including commercial and recreational fishery resources (marine fish and shellfish); anadromous fish species; endangered and threatened marine species; marine mammals and marine turtles; marshes, mangroves, seagrass beds, coral reefs, other coastal habitats, areas identified by NOAA Fisheries as essential fish habitat (EFH) and areas within EFH identified as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC). NOAA trust resources can also include marine habitats and resources associated with National Marine Sanctuaries, National Estuarine Research Reserves, and areas under state coastal management programs.

Successful applications will be those that:

- Demonstrate collaboration among entities such as public and nonprofit organizations, citizen and watershed groups, anglers, boaters, industry, corporations and businesses, youth conservation corps, students, landowners, academics, and local government, state, and federal agencies to cooperatively implement marine debris prevention and removal projects, and
- Are able to report the total amount of debris removed and types of debris encountered, and document volunteer hours involved or a maximization of project partnerships.

Partnerships that support multiple projects may be developed at national, regional and local levels and may contribute funding, technical assistance, workforce support or other in-kind services; promote grass-roots participation in the improvement of locally important living marine resources through marine debris prevention and removal activities; and engender local stewardship and monitoring activities to sustain and evaluate the success of the debris prevention or removal.

B. Program Priorities

The MDP is interested in funding projects that will result in on-the-ground benefits to living marine resource habitats and navigational waterways through the removal and/or prevention of marine debris and associated activities. Marine debris is defined to include derelict fishing gear such as abandoned traps, nets, and monofilament line, or any manufactured or processed solid waste material that enters the marine environment directly (e.g., by dumping) or indirectly (e.g., washed out to sea via rivers, streams, storm drains, etc.).

Marine debris removal may include, but is not limited to:

- Detection and removal of derelict fishing gear;
- Removal of solid waste material in coastal habitats including marshes, bays, mangroves, and coral reefs;
- Shoreline clean-ups including a targeted outreach/education component;
- Removal of debris from marine, estuarine or beach environments resulting from hurricanes or other natural disasters;
- Detection and removal of derelict pilings, bulkheads and similar obsolete materials that pose a hazard to navigation or diminish habitat quality.

Marine debris prevention may include, but is not limited to:

- Training for the safe removal of derelict fishing gear, ghost nets, and other debris adversely impacting coastal habitats;
- Monitoring cleaned areas to determine re-accumulation rates;
- Prevention activities related to reception facilities at marinas and fishing ports including recycling initiatives for monofilament fishing line and other types of fishing gear, or debris; and
- The development of debris reduction incentives for prevention, removal, and safe disposal of plastics and derelict fishing gear.

The MDP recognizes that the removal and prevention of marine debris can be a multi-faceted effort that may involve project design, engineering services, permitting, oversight, and education and outreach. The focus of the program, however, is to provide funding and technical expertise to support on-the-ground implementation of habitat restoration through marine debris prevention and removal that involves significant community support. To that end, projects must involve an outreach and/or volunteer component tied to the debris prevention and removal activities, and may involve limited pre-implementation activities, such as engineering and design and short-term baseline studies.

Implementation of on-the-ground debris removal projects must have clearly identified goals (broad in scope) and specific, measurable objectives. Evaluating these objectives must involve an assessment of effectiveness (i.e. comparing initial targets set for each objective to post-removal results). The assessment must be conducted in a timely fashion with a frequency and length of time appropriate to each parameter in the context of the project objectives and status.

For prevention activities, projects must have a targeted user community and substantial interaction and outreach with that community. These projects must also include measures to determine effectiveness of activities and identify how the project will continue in the future if it involves collection facilities or other long-term operations.

The MDP will consider funding more than one project under a single award. All projects should be sufficiently detailed as per the guidelines and information

requirements listed in this document for an application to be competitive, and all projects should be able to be completed within the award period specified below.

The MDP anticipates that a limited portion of available funds will be used to support high quality projects that transfer removal technology and methods to other parts of the U.S.

Proposals emphasizing general program coordination are discouraged, as are applications that propose to expand an organization's day-to-day activities, or that primarily seek support for administration, salaries, overhead and travel. Because funds are limited, large equipment purchases such as vehicles, boats and similar items will be a low priority. Applications proposing solely to conduct regular maintenance activities such as clean-ups are also likely to be considered a lower priority unless the clean-up activity is coupled with a significant outreach or other component that will reduce or prevent future accumulation of marine debris. For example, clean-up activities likely to be most competitive will be those coupled with a best management practice that limits the re-accumulation of debris, such as installation of a trash collecting system at a dam located closest to the coast designed to greatly reduce the amount of debris washing down rivers from entering the marine environment.

C. Program Authority

The Secretary of Commerce is authorized under the Marine Plastic Pollution Research and Control Act, 33 U.S.C. 1901 *et seq.*, to award grants, enter into cooperative agreements with appropriate officials of other Federal agencies and agencies of States and political subdivisions of States and with public and private entities, and provide other financial assistance to eligible recipients to educate the public (including recreational boaters, fishermen, and other users of the marine environment) regarding the harmful effects of plastic pollution; the need to reduce such pollution; the need to recycle plastic materials.

II. Award Information

A. Administration

This is the first year of the MDP. The Community-based Marine Debris Prevention and Removal Project Grants are funded through the MDP with appropriations to the Office of Response and Restoration, National Ocean Service for this purpose. The NOAA Restoration Center will administer this grants program in the same manner that the Community-based Restoration Program is conducted.

B Funding Availability

This solicitation announces that funding of up to \$2,000,000 is expected to be available for Community-based Marine Prevention and Removal Project Grants in FY 2006. The NOAA Restoration Center anticipates that typical project awards will range

from \$15,000 to \$100,000; NOAA will not accept proposals for under \$15,000 or proposals for over \$250,000 under this solicitation. There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for all proposals. The number of awards to be made as a result of this solicitation will depend on the number of eligible applications received, the amount of funds requested for initiating marine debris removal projects by the applicants, the merit and ranking of the proposals, and the amount of funds made available to the MDP by Congress.

The NOAA Restoration Center anticipates that between 10 and 25 awards will be made as a result of this solicitation. The exact amount of funds that may be awarded will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA representatives. Publication of this document does not obligate NOAA to award any specific project or obligate all or any part of any available funds.

C. Project/Award Period

Awards will be made for projects where requested funding will be used to complete proposed marine debris prevention and removal activities within a period of 18 months from the approved start date of the project. The earliest date for receipt of awards will be approximately 150-180 days after the close of this solicitation; applicants should consider this selection and processing time in developing requested start dates for proposed restoration activities. If an application is selected for funding, NOAA has no obligation to provide any additional prospective funding in connection with that award in subsequent years. Any subsequent proposal to continue work on an existing project must be submitted to the competitive process for consideration and will not receive preferential treatment. Permission to extend the period of performance beyond the 18 month award period is at the total discretion of NOAA and must be requested in writing at least 60 days in advance of an award's expiration date.

D. Type of Funding Instrument

Selected applications will be funded through a cooperative agreement since NOAA staff will be substantially involved in aspects of the project. Substantial involvement may include, but is not limited to, activities such as hands-on technical or permitting assistance, support in developing protocols, tracking the progression of the removal efforts through site visits and progress report evaluation, and involvement in public meetings and events to highlight marine debris prevention and removal activities.

E. Permits and Approvals

It is the applicant's responsibility to obtain all necessary Federal, state and local government permits and approvals where necessary for the proposed work to be conducted. Applicants are expected to design their proposals so that they minimize the potential for adverse impacts to the environment. If applicable, documentation of requests or approvals of required environmental permits should be included in the application package. Applications will be reviewed to ensure that they contain sufficient

information to allow NOAA staff to conduct a NEPA analysis so that appropriate NEPA documentation, required as part of the application package, can be submitted to the NOAA Grants Management Division (GMD) along with the recommendation for funding for selected applications. For more information see Section VI. B. “Administrative and National Environmental Policy Act Requirements”.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education, other non-profits, commercial (for profit) organizations, organizations under the jurisdiction of foreign governments, international organizations, and state, local and Indian tribal governments whose projects have the potential to benefit NOAA trust resources. Applications from federal agencies or employees of Federal agencies will not be considered. Federal agencies are strongly encouraged to work with states, non-governmental organizations, national service clubs or youth corps organizations and others that are eligible to apply.

The Department of Commerce/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (DOC/NOAA) is strongly committed to broadening the participation of historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, and institutions that work in under served areas. The MDP encourages proposals involving any of the above institutions.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirements

A major goal of the MDP is to provide seed money to projects that leverage funds and other contributions from a broad public and private sector to implement locally important marine debris prevention and removal activities to benefit living marine resources. To this end, applicants are encouraged to demonstrate a minimum 1:1 non-Federal match for MDP funds requested to conduct the proposed project. NOAA strongly encourages applicants to leverage as much investment as possible. Applicants with less than 1:1 match will not be disqualified, however, applicants should note that cost sharing is an element considered in Evaluation Criterion #4. “Project Costs”.

Match can come from a variety of public and private sources and can include in-kind goods and services such as private boat use and volunteer labor. Federal funds are not considered matching funds. Applicants are permitted to combine contributions from additional non-federal partners in order to meet the 1:1 match expected, as long as such contributions are not being used to match any other funds. Applicants are also permitted to apply federally negotiated indirect costs in excess of federal share limits as described in Section IV. E. 2. “Indirect Costs”.

Applicants whose proposals are selected for funding will be bound by the percentage of cost sharing reflected in the award document signed by the NOAA Grants Officer. Successful applicants should be prepared to carefully document matching

contributions, including the names of participating volunteers and the overall number of volunteer or community participation hours devoted to individual marine debris prevention or removal projects. Letters of commitment for any secured resources expected to be used as match for an award should be submitted as an attachment to the application.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

This solicitation, complete application packages (including required Federal forms) with instructions and the address for submission, and information on the NOAA Community-based Marine Debris Prevention and Removal Project Grants can be found at www.grants.gov, or by contacting Elizabeth Fairey (Liz.Fairey@noaa.gov or 301-713-3459) or Robin Bruckner (Robin.Bruckner@noaa.gov 301-713-0174).

The required forms are as follows:

- Application for Federal Assistance: **SF-424** (9/03 version or newer)
- Budget Information, Non-construction Programs: **SF-424A**
- Assurances, Non-construction Programs: **SF-424B**
- Certifications Regarding Debarment, Suspension, and other Responsibility Matters: Drug Free Workplace Environment: **CD-511**
- **CD-512** (remains with applicant—do not submit as part of the application package)

Depending on the applicant, the following forms may also be required:

- Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: **SF-LLL** (if applicable)
- Applicant for Federal Assistance: **CD-346** (required for the following individuals: Non-profit Organizations, Sole Proprietorship, Partnerships, Corporations and Joint Venture)

If the standard NOAA application forms and instructions for applicants cannot be downloaded from www.grants.gov contact Elizabeth Fairey (Liz.Fairey@noaa.gov or 301-713-3459) or Robin Bruckner (Robin.Bruckner@noaa.gov or 301-713-0174). Potential applicants are invited to contact NOAA staff before submitting an application to discuss the applicability of project ideas to the MDP's goals and objectives, and/or to request an application package that contains instructions for submitting standard NOAA grant applications.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply through the grants.gov website, www.grants.gov, the clearinghouse for Federal financial assistance. A complete standard

NOAA grant application package should be submitted in accordance with the guidelines in this document. Each application should include:

- Federal application forms specified above;
- A project summary that follows the prescribed format, not to exceed two pages;
- A narrative project description of no more than 10 pages, including a detailed narrative budget justification;
- The curriculum vitae or resume of primary project personnel;
- A site location map such as a USGS topographic quadrangle map with site location(s) highlighted; and
- Other relevant attachments the applicant deems important to the overall understanding and evaluation of the proposed project.

1. Summary Information (not to exceed two pages):

- **Applicant Organization**
- **Project Title**
- **Site Location** (nearest town or watershed, and geographic coordinates if known)
- **On-the Ground Activity Start Date** (not proposed award start date)
- **NOAA Trust Resources to benefit from the project** - habitat(s), organism(s) (species) currently using the project area or expected to benefit, and any listed threatened or endangered species in the project area or in the vicinity
- **Project Scope** (Briefly list specific tasks to be accomplished with requested funds, and proposed techniques that will be used)
- **Area to be Improved** (acreage, beach/stream miles to be cleaned of debris or other measurable outcome)
- **Project Time Line**
- **Permits** (identify permits expected to be necessary for this project and current status of applications or consultations)
- **Federal Funds Requested & Non-Federal Match Anticipated**
- **Overall Project Cost**
- **Partner and Volunteer Support Anticipated** (hours/tasks)
- **Letters of Support** (list those included with the application, particularly those from public agency resource personnel familiar with the issue or project area)

2. Narrative Project Description

The **narrative project description** should closely follow the organization of the evaluation criteria for the application to receive a consistent review against competing applications. The body of the narrative description should be no more than 10 pages long (in 12-point font with 1" margins) including a narrative budget justification, and should give a clear presentation of the proposed work. In general, proposals should clearly demonstrate anticipated benefits to specific NOAA trust resource habitats (such as salt marshes, seagrass beds, coral reefs, mangrove forests, and riparian habitat near rivers, streams and creeks used by anadromous fish) and/or navigable waterways, describe how these benefits will be achieved through marine debris prevention and/or removal, and

identify the range of species and/or resources expected to benefit. Applications should list the trust resources currently found in the project site, describe short- and long-term objectives and goals, detail the methods for carrying out and monitoring the project, and clearly explain the project's relevance and significance to enhancing habitat to benefit living marine resources and/or navigable waterways.

The applicant should indicate whether the proposed project is part of a larger, ongoing effort, or otherwise prioritized in a publicly vetted, published restoration or planning document. Projects taking place in marine protected areas such as National Marine Sanctuaries, National Estuarine Research Reserves, or in special management areas such as those under state coastal management, in National Estuary Program sites, in Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) or areas within EFH identified as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern may receive greater funding consideration.

To ensure a basic level of assessment of project success, implementation of marine debris prevention and removal projects must have clearly identified goals (broad in scope) and specific, measurable objectives. Proposals related to monitoring should describe how monitoring or post-removal evaluation(s) would be conducted by comparing pre-implementation targets to post-removal results for each parameter in the context of the project objectives.

To provide assurance that the project will expeditiously meet environmental compliance and permitting requirements, so that on-the-ground debris removal activities will begin within the first 6 months after the project's start date, projects that would require permits and consultations should list all necessary permits required to complete the project, including the appropriate contact information for each permitting agency and documentation of all permits already secured for the project. Applicants proposing to conduct specific marine debris removal activities, such as removal of derelict fishing gear, should demonstrate that they have the legal authority to conduct the stated activities within the proposed project area.

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicants that are seeking NOAA federal funding. Proposals should provide enough detail for NOAA to make a NEPA determination (see Section VI. B. "Administrative and National Environmental Policy Act Requirements"). Successful applications cannot be forwarded to the NOAA Grants Management Division with recommendations for funding until NOAA completes necessary NEPA documentation (see Section I.B. "Program Priorities"). Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under the description of proposed activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, such as site locations, species and habitat(s) to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use of and/or disposal of hazardous or toxic substances, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, impacts to coral reef systems, etc.).

In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting of an environmental assessment if NOAA determines an assessment is required and one does not already exist for the activities proposed in the application. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for the denial of an application.

Applicants are encouraged to consult with NOAA as early as possible to obtain guidance with respect to the level and scope of information needed by NOAA to comply with NEPA. A phased approach to funding project activities may be recommended, or special award conditions may be imposed limiting the use of funds for activities that have outstanding environmental compliance requirements to fulfill. The type of detailed information described above is critical to evaluating the significance of a project and its readiness to use available funding.

The project narrative should describe the organizational structure of the applicant group, identify proposed project staff, and detail their experience and qualifications. If known, the applicant should state the level of NOAA involvement in, and/or support for the project and include contact information of relevant NOAA staff.

Applications will be evaluated for cost-effectiveness by examining the proportion of funds directed to the prevention and/or removal/monitoring activities compared with that to be used for general program support. Budgets must include a detailed breakdown by category of cost (object class) separated into federal and non-federal shares as they relate to specific aspects of the project, with appropriate narrative justification for both the federal and non-federal shares.

If funding will be used to complete part of a larger project, a budget for the entire project should be provided to allow the selecting official to make an informed determination of a project's readiness and cost-benefit ratio. A narrative budget justification should indicate if the project has been submitted for funding consideration elsewhere, what amount has been requested or secured from other sources, and whether the funds requested/secured are federal or non-federal. The narrative budget justification is included within the overall narrative project description 10-page limit.

The project narrative should also describe community involvement in the project, such as community participants (project partners) other than the applicant and their contributions, volunteer opportunities, education/outreach/stewardship plans, and efforts to disseminate information on project goals and results and/or the sources of project funding and support. If applicable, the narrative should explain how the proposed project would complement or encourage other local marine debris prevention or removal, or restoration or conservation activities.

Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NOAA as to the relative merits of the project described in the application. Inclusion of supplementary

materials such as photographs, project designs, diagrams, copies of secured permits, letters of support, etc. are strongly encouraged and do not count toward the project narrative page limit.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply through www.grants.gov. It takes approximately 3 weeks to register with grants.gov, and registration is required only once. Applicants should consider the time needed to register with grants.gov, and should begin the registration process well in advance of the application due date. If grants.gov cannot reasonably be used, a hard copy (signed in blue ink) of each application may be submitted to the NOAA Restoration Center (see sub-section G. “Addresses”). Paper applications should be printed on one side only and should not be bound in any manner.

Applications that are aligned with Community-based Marine Debris Prevention and Removal Project Grants that are submitted directly to other NOAA grants programs or as part of another NOAA grant may be considered under this solicitation.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications should be submitted via www.grants.gov, and must be received by grants.gov **no later than 11:59 PM EST on October 12, 2005** to be considered for funding. If grants.gov cannot reasonably be used, applications must be postmarked, or provided to a delivery service and documented with a receipt, by **October 12, 2005**. Applications submitted via the U.S. Postal Service must have an official postmark; private metered postmarks are not acceptable. In any event, applications received later than 15 business days following the postmark closing date will not be accepted. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this program are subject to the provisions of Executive Order 12372, “Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs.” Any applicant submitting an application for funding is required to complete item 16 on SF-424 regarding clearance by the State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) established as a result of EO 12372. To find out about and comply with a State’s process under EO 12372, the names, addresses and phone numbers of participating SPOC’s are listed in the Office of Management and Budget’s home page at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>.

E. Funding Restrictions

1. Allowable Costs

Funds awarded cannot necessarily pay for all the costs that the recipient might incur in the course of carrying out the project. Generally, costs that are allowable include salaries, equipment, and supplies, as long as these are “necessary and reasonable” specifically for the purpose of the award. Allowable costs are determined by reference to the OMB Circulars A-122, “Cost Principles for Non-profit Organizations”; A-21, “Cost

Principles for Education Institutions”; A-87, “Cost Principles for State, Local and Indian Tribal Governments”; and Federal Acquisition Regulation, codified at 48 Code of Federal Regulations, subpart 31.2 “Contracts with Commercial Organizations.” All cost reimbursement subawards (subgrants, subcontracts, etc.) are subject to those federal cost principles applicable to the particular type of organization concerned.

Pre-award costs are generally unallowable. The earliest date for receipt of awards will be approximately 150-180 days after the close of this solicitation. Applicants should consider this selection and processing time in developing requested start dates for proposed restoration activities.

2. Indirect Costs

The budget may include an amount for indirect costs if the applicant has an established indirect cost rate with the federal government. Indirect costs are essentially overhead costs for basic operational functions (e.g., lights, rent, water, insurance) that are incurred for common or joint objectives and therefore cannot be identified specifically within a particular project. For this solicitation, the federal share of the indirect costs must not exceed the lesser of either the indirect costs the applicant would be entitled to if the negotiated federal indirect cost rate were used or 25 percent of the federal direct costs proposed. For those situations in which the use of the applicant’s indirect cost rate would result in indirect costs greater than 25 percent of the federal direct costs, the difference may be counted as part of the non-federal share.

A copy of the current, approved negotiated indirect cost agreement with the federal government should be included with the application. If the applicant does not have a current negotiated rate and plans to seek reimbursement for indirect costs, documentation necessary to establish a rate must be submitted within 90 days of receiving an award.

F. Other Submission Requirements

Applicants should submit applications via www.grants.gov. For those applicants who cannot reasonably apply through grants.gov, send applications to Christopher D. Doley, Director, NOAA Restoration Center, NOAA Fisheries (F/HC3), 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910, **ATTN: MDP Project Applications**.

V. Application Review and Selection Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Reviewers will assign scores to proposals ranging from 0 to 100 points based on the following five standard NOAA evaluation criteria and respective weights specified below.

1. Importance and Applicability of Proposal (25 points)

This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state or local activities. For the Community-based Marine Debris Prevention and Removal Project Grants competition, NOAA will evaluate applications based on the following:

- The potential of the marine debris prevention or removal activity to restore, protect, conserve or enhance coastal and marine habitats and ecosystems vital to self-sustaining populations of living marine resources (LMR) under NOAA stewardship (including commercial, recreational, threatened or endangered species), and the extent to which marine debris prevention and removal activities are expected to result in direct ecological benefits or otherwise maximize benefits for LMR. For monitoring of marine debris removal projects, applications will be considered with respect to their potential to comprehensively evaluate accumulation rates or other appropriate monitoring parameter. Projects occurring in marine protected areas such as National Marine Sanctuaries, National Estuarine Research Reserves, special management areas, areas identified by NOAA as essential fish habitat (EFH) or areas within EFH identified as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern may receive greater consideration.
- The project's significance with respect to area or amount of debris removed, or its potential to reduce or prevent marine debris, considered in the context of the local environment.
- The likelihood that the project will deliver tangible, specific results that are measurable. Examples may include number of removal operations; number of discrete items removed (e.g. crab pots, fill nets, pilings); square feet/acres cleared of debris; pounds of debris removed; percent of identified problem areas (for derelict gear or debris) addressed by removal activities; re-accumulation rate per unit area; number of fishers who receive training on the safe removal of derelict gear or specific debris types; change in volume of recycled gear as a result of a corporate recycling initiative, etc. Those applications that identify parameters and targets are likely to score higher on this criterion.
- Whether the proposal addresses a priority habitat as evidenced by reference to a restoration plan, stewardship plan or similar publicly vetted, published planning document.

2. Technical/Scientific Merit (25 points)

This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. For the Community-based Marine Debris Prevention and Removal Project Grants competition, proposals will be evaluated based on the following:

- The completeness and adequacy of detail in the project description, including clearly stated objectives and goals, and the extent to which the implementation plan is achievable within the 18-month award period.

- Whether proposed activities are technically feasible and likely to achieve stated project goals and objectives, and can be safely conducted.
- Whether applications that propose shoreline clean-up type activities are coupled with a significant outreach or other component that will reduce or prevent future accumulation of marine debris, or consist of a one-time clean-up event (as opposed to ongoing maintenance), such as debris removal related to natural disasters or similar point-in-time event.
- For assurance that implementation of the project will begin within the first 6 months after a project's proposed start date. Projects that would require permits and consultations should list all necessary permits required to complete the project, including the appropriate contact information for each permitting agency and documentation of all permits already secured for the project, to provide assurance that the project will meet all federal, state and local environmental laws. Applications submitted with evidence of completed environmental assessments, completed consultations and/or secured permits, and that demonstrate that proposed debris removal activities are legally permissible in the project area, if applicable, are likely to score higher on this criterion. And for monitoring projects, whether the monitoring results have the potential to further advance marine debris prevention and removal efforts.

3. Overall Qualifications of Applicants (10 points)

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For the Community-based Marine Debris Prevention and Removal Project Grants competition, NOAA will evaluate applications based on the following:

- The capacity of the applicant and associated project personnel to conduct the scope and scale of the proposed work, as indicated by the qualifications and past experience of the project leaders and/or partners in designing, implementing and effectively managing and overseeing projects that benefit living marine resources. Examples of projects similar in scope and nature that have been successfully completed by the implementation team are encouraged. Communities and/or organizations developing their first locally-driven marine debris prevention or removal project may not be able to document past experience, and therefore will be evaluated on their potential to effectively manage and oversee all project phases, as evidenced by the explanation of characteristics such as education, training and/or experience of primary project participants.
- The facilities and/or administrative resources and capabilities available to the applicant to support and successfully manage marine debris prevention or removal work, including the availability of NOAA or other technical expertise to guide the project to a successful completion. Applicants with demonstrated or potential

NOAA involvement in or support for the proposed project may score higher on this criterion.

4. Project Costs (20 points)

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame. For the Community-based Marine Prevention and Debris Removal Project Grants competition proposals will be evaluated on the following:

- Their cost-effectiveness. Reviewers will examine the percentage of funds that will be dedicated to all phases of project implementation including physical, on-the-ground prevention or removal efforts and, if applicable, science-based monitoring, compared to the percentage for general program support such as administration, salaries, overhead and travel. Applications proposing to use MDP funds to expand an organization's day-to-day activities are unlikely to obtain a high score under this criterion. To encourage on-the-ground efforts and tangible results, funding for salaries must be used to support staff directly involved in accomplishing the debris prevention and/or removal work and should contain a detailed breakdown of personnel hours and costs by task.
- Whether the proposed budget is realistic, based on the applicant's stated objectives and time frame, and sufficiently detailed, with appropriate budget breakdown and justification of both federal and non-federal shares by object class as listed on form SF-424A. Requests for equipment (any single piece of equipment costing \$5,000 or more) should be strongly tied to achieving on-the-ground habitat improvements and a comparison with rental costs should be used to justify the need to purchase. In general, funding requests for equipment purchases such as vehicles, boats and similar items will be a low priority.
- The ability of the applicant to demonstrate that a significant benefit will be generated for a reasonable cost. If funds are requested for partial support of a project, the budget will be examined with respect to the overall project budget to allow an informed determination of a project's readiness and cost-benefit ratio.
- The demonstrated need for funding and the overall leverage of NOAA funds anticipated, including the amount of match. NOAA will expect cost-sharing at a 1:1 level to leverage funding or other resources that improve cost-effectiveness and to further encourage partnerships among government, industry, and academia. Applicants that provide documentation that acceptable secured match is available within the proposed project period are likely to score higher on this criterion.

5. Outreach, Education and Community Involvement (20 points)

NOAA assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission. For the Community-based Marine Debris Prevention and Removal Project Grants competition, proposals will be evaluated on the following:

- Whether the activities proposed will involve citizens and broaden their participation in coastal marine debris prevention or removal activities, and lead to achievement of long-term stewardship for restored living marine resources and a heightened community conservation ethic. Community participation may include hands-on training, involvement in marine debris prevention and education activities, physical debris removal and monitoring activities undertaken by volunteers or work crews.
- On the depth and breadth of community support, as reflected by the diversity and strength of project partners, sponsorship by local entities (either through in-kind goods and services such as boat use time, technical expertise, or cash contributions), and/or written support from state and local governments, members of Congress, or relevant resource agency personnel familiar with the issue.
- Public outreach as it relates to the proposed project, including plans to disseminate information on project goals, results, project partners and their roles, sources of funding and other support provided; and the potential for the proposed project to encourage future restoration, conservation, and protection of living marine resources or complement other local restoration or conservation activities.
- A letter of commitment from the appropriate resource agency personnel for a project in permanently protected areas, or from the affected landowner for a project on private property.

B. Review and Selection Process

Applications will be screened by NOAA staff to determine if they are eligible, complete and in accordance with instructions detailed in the standard NOAA Grants Application Package. Applications that present narrative information in the same order as the evaluation criteria set out above are likely to be more competitive, as reviewers will be more easily able to identify information that directly translates to scoring. Eligible restoration proposals will undergo a technical review, ranking, and selection process. As appropriate during this process, the NOAA Restoration Center will solicit from MDP staff individual technical evaluations of each project proposed to determine how well it meets the aims of the MDP, and may request evaluations from other NOAA offices and staff, the Regional Fishery Management Councils, other federal and state agencies, such as state coastal management agencies and state fish and wildlife agencies, and private and public sector experts who have knowledge of a specific applicant, program or its subject matter.

Applications for marine debris prevention and removal projects will be evaluated by at least three individual technical reviewers, including those mentioned in the above paragraph, according to the criteria and weights described in this solicitation. The proposals will be rated, and reviewer comments and composite project scores and a rank order will be presented to the Director of The NOAA Restoration Center (Director). The Director, in consultation with the Office of Response and Restoration Director, where the

MDP is located, and their respective program staff will select the proposals to be recommended to the Grants Management Division (GMD) for funding and determine the amount of funds available for each approved proposal. The proposals shall be recommended in the rank order unless the selection of a proposal out of rank order is justified based upon one or more of the following factors:

1. The availability of funding;
2. The balance/distribution of funds:
 - a. Geographically,
 - b. By type of institutions,
 - c. By type of partners,
 - d. By habitat type;
3. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA and/or other federal agencies;
4. Program priorities and policy factors as set out in section I.A and B;
5. The applicant's prior award performance;
6. Partnerships and/or participation of targeted groups; and A
7. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to GMD.

Hence, awards may not necessarily be made to the highest scored proposals. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their proposal was not among those recommended for funding. Unsuccessful applications submitted in hard copy will be kept on file until the close of the following fiscal year then destroyed.

Successful applicants generally will be identified approximately 90-120 days after the close of this solicitation. The earliest date for receipt of awards will be approximately 150-180 days after the close of this solicitation, when all NOAA/applicant negotiations and NEPA analysis and documentation supporting cooperative agreement activities have been completed. Applicants should consider this selection and processing time in developing requested start dates for proposed restoration activities.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants may be asked to modify objectives, work plans, or budgets prior to final approval of an award. The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each project will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office, and NOAA program staff. Projects should not be initiated in expectation of federal funding until a notice of award document is received from the NOAA Grants Office.

B. Administrative and National Environmental Policy Act Requirements

1. Administrative Requirements.

Successful applicants that accept a NOAA award under this solicitation will be bound by Department of Commerce standard terms and conditions. This document will be provided with a copy of the award by the NOAA Grants Office, and can be found at: <http://www.osec.doc.gov/oebam/pdf/ST&C-rev-1002.pdf>.

In addition, award documents provided by the NOAA Grants Office may contain special award conditions limiting the use of funds for activities that have outstanding environmental compliance requirements to fulfill, and/or stating other compliance requirements for the award as applicable, such as the required use of the NOAA Restoration Center (RC) data form and narrative format approved by OMB under control number 0648-0472 for submitting semi-annual progress reports.

2. NEPA Requirements

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals, which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6_TOC.pdf, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm. Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their program activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems).

In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting of an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for the denial of an application.

Applicants proposing marine debris prevention and removal activities that cannot be categorically excluded from further NEPA analysis or that are not covered by the NOAA Fisheries Community-based Restoration Program Environmental Assessment (PEA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or Supplemental PEA and FONSI will be informed after the peer review stage and may be requested to assist in the preparation of an EA prior to an award being made, or provide for NOAA review a copy

of an EA that covers proposed activities if one exists. The Community-based Restoration Program PEA and FONSI can be found at:

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/projects_programs/crp/assessment/ea_main.html.

C. Reporting Requirements

Progress reports are due semi-annually and cover 6-month periods that begin with the start date listed in award documentation provided by GMD. Progress reports are due directly to the NOAA Restoration Center and are due no later than 30 days after each 6-month project period. A final report is due no later than 90 days after the expiration date of an award.

Progress reports must be submitted using a specific format for narrative information and a fill-form for project specific details that can be found on the NOAA Restoration Center website at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration>. Use of this required progress report form and format involves collection-of-information requirements subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act, and has been approved by OMB under control number 0648-0472 and expires on April 30, 2006. Complete details on reporting requirements will be provided to successful applicants in the award documentation provided by the NOAA Grants office.

Financial reports cover the periods from October 1 - March 31 (due by April 30) and April 1 - September 30 (due by October 30), and should be submitted directly to the NOAA Grants Management Division as per instructions contained in official NOAA award documentation.

Recipients of MDP funding are strongly encouraged to submit project information on-line through the National Estuary Restoration Inventory (NERI) at <https://neri.noaa.gov/>. Submission of project information through NERI is not a substitute for submitting the mandatory RC progress report form and format. Only projects receiving funding through the Estuary Restoration Act are required to submit project information on-line through NERI. NERI is a web-based inventory of restoration projects that restoration practitioners can use to track the success and progress of their own projects. Projects submitted to NERI may be counted toward the one million acre goal of the Estuary Restoration Act and information will be available for on-line queries and reports once the project is approved. This collection-of-information is subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act, and has been approved by OMB under control number 0648-0479 and expires on July 31, 2006. For more information on submitting projects to NERI, see <https://neri.noaa.gov/about.html>.

VII. Agency Contacts

For further information contact Elizabeth Fairey (Liz.Fairey@noaa.gov or 301-713-3459) or Robin Bruckner (Robin.Bruckner@noaa.gov or 301-713-0174).

VIII. Other Information

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of October 1, 2001 (66 FR 49917), as amended by the Federal Register notice published on October 30, 2002 (67 FR 66109), are applicable to this solicitation.

In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if programs fail to receive funding or are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

Prior notice and an opportunity for public comment are not required by the Administrative Procedure Act [5 U.S.C. 553 (a) (2)] or by any other law for this document concerning grants, benefits, and contracts. Accordingly, a regulatory flexibility analysis is not required by the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S. C. 601 et seq.).

This action has been determined to be not significant for purposes of Executive Order 12866.

The use of the standard NOAA grant application package referred to in this notice involves collection-of-information requirements subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act. The use of Standard Forms 424, 424A, 424B, SF-LLL, and CD-346 have been approved by OMB under the respective control numbers 0348-0043, 0348-0044, 0348-0040, 0348-0046, and 0605-0001.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person is required to respond to, nor shall any person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with, a collection of information subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act, unless that collection displays a currently valid OMB control number.

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